

MILITARISM IN EAST GERMANY

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East Germany today has surpassed the militarism of the Hitler regime. The DDR military machine, officially created in January 1956, has in reality existed since 1948, operating under the fiction that it was a police force.

Despite this pretense during its first eight years, the resemblance of the DDR Army to Hitler's Wehrmacht is reflected in such striking similarities as organization and command structure, para-military formations, marching discipline, parades and personnel. From the beginning, the East German regime has relied heavily for personnel on former Wehrmacht officers and has publicly solicited the support of ex-Nazis.

The most significant similarity is the indoctrination and military training of youth from the age of six. The military idols of the past have been resurrected and held up to the young people for glorification as symbols of a new German nationalism. Moreover, the East German regime has undertaken a systematic appeal to German patriotism aimed at fostering a resurgent and aggressive nationalism.

In view of these facts, Communist propaganda alleging a revival of militarism in West Germany is sheer hypocrisy, designed as a smokescreen to divert attention from the militaristic machine which the Communists themselves have created and nurtured to control the East German state.

Growth of Militarism

The Swastika has given way to Red Star, Mein Kampf to Das Kapital and Wehrmacht to Nationale Volksarmee, but the militarism which characterized Hitler's Third Reich prevails today in greater strength in Ulbricht's East Germany. Uniforms and the other trappings of a militaristic society are becoming increasingly familiar sights in every city and town in the German Democratic Republic (Deutsche Demokratische Republik - DDR).

This is due not only to the existence of the National People's Army (Nationale Volksarmee - NVA), for regular army personnel constitute no more than one-half of the DDR's total military forces. Other contingents, although military in character, masquerade under the label of police, such as Border, Transport

and Alert Police. To these must be added the ubiquitous Security Police (Staatssicherheitsdienst), thousands of whom are organized into para-military formations.

The DDR's resemblance to Hitler's militaristic Reich is heightened by the existence of other para-military formations. Just as the Nazi Party had its Storm Troopers, the East German Communist Party (Sozialistische Einheitspartei - SED) has its uniformed armed troops, the Kampfgruppen (Fighting Groups - sometimes called armed workers' militia), which are organized along military lines and are to be found in every factory, co-operative, enterprise and institution in the DDR.

One of the most frightening aspects of East German militarism is the systematic indoctrination of youth from the age of 6. Children aged 6 through 10 are inducted into the Young Pioneers (Junge Pioniere), in which they learn the rudiments of marching and saluting, and are inculcated with militaristic ideas. At 10 they graduate into the Thaelmann Pioneers (Thaelmann-Pioniere), in which their indoctrination and training continues for the next four years.

The parent organization of both these pioneer groups is the Free German Youth (Freie Deutsche Jugend - FDJ), which enrolls all youths over 14 years of age. An official arm of the SED, the FDJ, with three million members, who wear blue uniforms, continues on a more intensive and advanced basis the military training its members have earlier received in the pioneer groups. The FDJ consequently serves as one of the primary sources for recruits for the various DDR military services.

Even more militaristic than the FDJ is the Society for Sport and Technology (Gesellschaft fuer Sport und Technik - GST). Organized on 7 August 1952 within the framework of the Ministry of Interior but transferred to the control of the Ministry of Defense in March 1956, the GST has the avowed mission of carrying out pre-military training of both boys and girls aged 14 to 24-- training which is on a scale far exceeding that of the old Hitler Youth, which served as a model for both the FDJ and GST.

Recruited from the ranks of the FDJ, the GST members, who wear the blue uniform of the FDJ, are organized along military lines into "hundreds," platoons and squads. Training is carried out by GST functionaries who are reserve members of the various military services and includes firing practice, gliding and parachuting, radio instruction, and map reading. All GDR schools, in fact, have been ordered to devote at least one hour a day to military education, including compulsory firing practice for all boys and girls over 12 and jumping from parachute towers for older

The NVA's resemblance to the Wehrmacht, however, is due to more than just the regime's efforts to recreate a militaristic society. The original military units organized at Soviet orders in 1948 were composed primarily of ex-Nazis and former members of the Wehrmacht. According to Robert Bialek, the first Inspector General of the DDR army (then called People's Police), who fled to the West in 1953, the 20,000 men who comprised the first two divisions to be organized were drafted from Russian prisoner-of-war camps and were, to a large extent, former members of SA (Storm Trooper) and SS (Elite Guard) battalions.

The first police commandant (and now Commanding General of the NVA's Army Corps North) was Lt. Gen. Hermann Rentsch of the Wehrmacht, who had as his Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Vincenz Mueller, deputy commander of the German IV Army when it capitulated in 1945. Mueller continued to serve as Chief of Staff of the DDR Army, under all of its various names, until he was relieved in March 1958. Initially, all of his immediate subordinates were also former Wehrmacht generals, for example, Martin Lattmann, Otto Korfes, Arno von Lenski, Wulz and Freytag.

By 1956, 17 former Wehrmacht officers held general rank in the DDR Army. Of these, five had held the same rank in Hitler's Wehrmacht. Of the 65 colonels in the DDR military establishment, 45 had been in the Wehrmacht as had more than one-third of the 1,500 staff officers holding lesser ranks.

The Communists have been quite frank about their use of former Nazis. For example, on 26 March 1952, the Berlin Tagliche Rundschau, then the official organ of the Soviet Control Commission, quoted Gen. Mueller to the effect that "Today former members of the Nazi Party and former professional soldiers and officers occupy responsible positions in all branches of East German economic, political, and cultural life." Three months later in June the East German regime issued an open letter which invited all former Nazi officers to join the "new" military organization (the Garrisoned People's Police). The DDR Parliament followed this up in October by enacting a special law restoring full citizenship rights to all former Nazis.

The Communists have justified this courtship of Nazis on the grounds that they had "broken with their past." Neues Deutschland, official SED organ, made this point on 25 March 1954 with the claim that these men had proved their patriotism by honest work. "German workers," the paper said, "judge the former officer, insofar as he was not a war criminal, not by his past but by what he is doing today for the peace and unity of Germany."

children. In the spring of 1958, it is estimated that the GST had about 625,000 members, of whom at least 160,000 were active.

The GST, even more than the FDJ, is designed to provide a steady and already partly trained source of recruits for DDR military components. Those members who reach the age of 24 (GST's upper age limit) without having been inducted into one of the regular military services are expected to pass into the ranks of the Kampfgruppen, whose lower age limit is 25.

Due to this hierarchical system of pre-military training organizations and to the fact that the Communist dictatorship can decree the career which every East German should follow, the regime has no need for a system of conscription. However, since volunteers are deemed more reliable and tractable than unwilling recruits, the DDR regime has undertaken a systematic appeal to German patriotism aimed at fostering aggressive nationalism.

As part of this appeal, they have been glorifying the old German military heroes, just as the Soviets, for similar reasons, have glorified Czarist military heroes such as Nevsky, Kutuzov, Suvarov, etc. For example, Egbert von Frankenburg, once commander of Hitler's "Edelweiss" Bomber Formation and today a DDR radio commentator, declared in a broadcast of 21 January 1956 that the NVA must act in the "tradition established by the heroes of the armed popular uprisings, knowing that Scharnhorst and Gneisenau, Blucher and Schill fought for the liberation of the Fatherland, as did the armed formations of the German Länder /provinces/ in 1848".

The changes which were introduced at the time of the creation of the NVA were further steps in the regime's campaign to increase the prestige of the military services. The former "police" personnel, in their Russian-type olive-green tunics, were hated by the populace, who regarded them as ersatz Russians. Now that the army has reacquired a typical German appearance and service has been made attractive by high rates of pay and traditional military privileges, soldiers again command respect and officers and noncommissioned officers are becoming a new elite. The regime has even designated 1 March as a national holiday, Day of the National People's Army, when the military services are glorified by parades and speeches.

The NVA today is strikingly reminiscent of the Wehrmacht under Hitler. It is not only similar in appearance--it wears the familiar field-gray uniform and jack-boots, the traditional regimental parade emblems, proficiency badges and other insignia--but it also has the same unmistakable marching discipline. The "goose-step" has been introduced, and the old German Army marches and even songs of Hitler's SS troops are again heard.

The Alert Units, then having a total strength of 51,000 men and already equipped with such heavy military weapons as tanks and cannon, were organized as skeleton Soviet-type mechanized regiments, each with three combat infantry units, an artillery unit, and the usual supporting components and administrative headquarters. There were 24 of these Alert Units, each with 371 officers and 1,432 NCO's and enlisted men, as well as specialist units such as signals and engineers. There was also a system of military training schools, including ones for "political indoctrination and culture," infantry, artillery, engineers, signals, armor, and senior officers.

The People's Police made their first public appearance as a military service in a parade held on 28 May 1950 in connection with a meeting of the Freie Deutsche Jugend. At that point, the traditional German Army handbooks were already being used for training purposes. The men were garbed in Nazi uniforms, only slightly altered and dyed black, with SS-type black boots and a red necktie.

Although the regime was keeping up the pretense of the VP's being only a police force, Neues Deutschland, on 24 July 1950, quoted VP Inspector Thiele as boasting to an SED Party Congress that the police "are true friends of the Soviet Union and ready in the event of aggression to fight against aggressors and in support of the Soviet Union in bringing about peace." Clearly, only a military force could expect to be of any help in real fighting.

In August 1952, the police forces were once again reorganized. The VP now became the Garrisoned People's Police (Kasernierte Volkspolizei - KVP). The Alert Units, too, were given an even more unmistakable military character by being transformed into divisional cadres of 2,500-3,500 men each, capable of easy expansion into Soviet-type mechanized divisions of 8,000. Lt. Gen. Heinz Hoffmann, Commander of the KVP-Ground (a naval force had been created in mid-1950 and an embryonic airforce in March 1951), openly boasted that "we are not policemen, we are soldiers." In October police rank designations were discarded in favor of traditional military terminology, and a new Soviet-type olive-green uniform was introduced.

Following the June 1953 uprising, during which considerable numbers of police evinced sympathy for the people, the KVP was reorganized. Hoffmann now became Commander of all military forces --KVP-Ground, KVP-Sea and KVP-Air--as well as Deputy Minister of Interior, with a view to assuring tighter discipline and greater political reliability. At that time, ground forces numbered

The above facts make it clear that Communist propaganda alleging a revival of militarism in West Germany is actually a smokescreen designed to divert attention from the militaristic atmosphere which pervades all levels of DDR society. On 18 January 1956, when the DDR Parliament (Volkskammer) enacted a law officially creating a Ministry of Defense and the NVA to counter the threat of the alleged West German militarism, the Bonn Government had no more than 1,500 men under arms. In contrast, the DDR armed forces, then already numbering more than 110,000, had been in existence since 1948, although they had been euphemistically termed "police." Significantly, the law creating the NVA was presented to the DDR Parliament by Willi Stoph, SED Politburo member and now Minister of Defense, while wearing the three-star uniform of a colonel general. He could not then have been a general if a DDR Army had not already been in existence.

Growth of DDR Military Forces

The groundwork for the creation of a DDR military establishment was laid in 1947 when the Soviets created in Berlin a Special Administration for Internal Affairs, with the mission of controlling all Soviet Zone police. The Four Occupying Powers had agreed in 1945 that only provincial police organizations would be permitted; but since this interfered with Soviet plans to rearm East Germany under the cover of police activities, the Soviets had no scruples in violating the agreement.

The formation of a zonal police--People's Police (Volks-polizei - VP)--was officially announced in December 1947. Although used for propaganda reasons, the term "police" was not entirely inappropriate, for East Germany was--and still is--a "police state" in the fullest sense. It may also be recalled that the famous Herman Goering Regiment was composed primarily of police and that one SS division rejoiced in the name Polizei-division.

The initial VP personnel, including 500 officers, were recruited from POW camps in Russia. Almost immediately military-type Alert Units (Bereitschaften) were formed within the framework of the VP. By early 1949, these military units numbered 40,000.

In 1949 the VP was placed under a so-called Administration for Schooling (Verwaltung fuer Schulung). In October, with the creation of the DDR regime, a disguised general staff was created within the DDR Ministry of Interior under the innocuous sounding title of Main Administration for Training (Hauptverwaltung fuer Ausbildung - HVA).

The strength of the NVA is approximately 110,000, of whom 11,000 are in the Air Force and 10,000 in the Navy. There are also 80,000 reserves, of whom approximately 20,000 serve in the Ministry and as cadres at military training schools. Operational command lies with Lt. Gen. Heinz Hoffmann, who acts through a Chief of Staff (Lt. Gen. Vincenz Mueller until March 1958) and the commanders of the individual (land, air, sea) services. Army headquarters, like the Defense Ministry, is located in Strausberg and directly controls troops of divisional strength.

For operational purposes the Army is divided into Army Corps North (officially Military District V) and Army Corps South (Military District III). Military Districts I, II and IV centered respectively in Rostock, Magdeburg and Frankfurt/Oder have not yet been activated and have no troops attached to them.

Army Corps North, with headquarters at Neubrandenburg (formerly at Pasewalk) is composed of the 6th motorized Rifle Division at Prenzlau, the 8th motorized Rifle Division at Schwerin, and the 9th Tank (i.e., Panzer) Division at Eggesin. Army Corps South, with headquarters at Leipzig, includes the 4th motorized Rifle Division at Erfurt, the 11th motorized Rifle Division at Halle, and the 7th Tank Division at Dresden. Directly under Army headquarters are the 1st motorized Rifle Division at Potsdam, the Guard Regiment, and five other regiments.

Armaments include modern cannon and howitzers up to 152 mm., anti-aircraft guns up to 100 mm., mortars up to 120 mm.; altogether the NVA has about 1,500 cannon, 900 mortars, and 450 assault guns. Mechanized equipment includes at least 1,000 medium and heavy tanks and about 600 armored cars.

The NVA has taken over the military school system established under the VP and KVP. Today, these include officer schools for the different services, a Military Academy at Dresden, a Cadet School at Naumburg, a Military Medical School at Griefswald, and a Political Officers School at Berlin-Treptow.

The Air Force Command has its headquarters in Cottbus. Commanded by Maj. Gen. Heinz Kessler, it comprises the 1st Air Division at Cottbus, the 2nd Division at Drewitz (near Cottbus), the 3rd Air Division at Bautzen, and the 4th Air Division at Preschen. The Air Force has about 350 YAK-18 and YAK-11 training planes and about 350 MIG jets. It has its own training schools and installations. An Anti-Aircraft Division, organized in 1957, is under a separate Air Defense Command.

100,000, the naval forces 8,700 and the air forces about 6,500. The fact that the ground forces were equipped with Stalin and T-34 tanks and artillery as large as 152 mm. gun-howitzers reveals how truly military the KVP really was, despite its alleged police character.

The army continued under the name KVP until 18 January 1956, when the DDR Parliament enacted the law officially establishing the present NVA and a Ministry of Defense. The actual result was merely a change of nomenclature and, shortly thereafter, a return to the traditional German Army uniform.

It should be noted that the NVA actually constitutes only about one-half of the DDR's total military forces. Other components have been developed along with the VP-KVP-NVA, so that there are now approximately 38,000 Frontier Police, 8,500 Transport Police, and 25,000 to 28,000 Alert Police, all of whom are soldiers. Today the DDR has a total military establishment more than twice as large as that of West Germany; while in proportion to population (DDR with 17 million and West Germany with 53 million), the DDR force is six times as large. These figures, moreover, do not take into account the thousands of East German para-military security police and the even larger numbers of armed workers' militia (Kampfgruppen).

Military Components of the DDR

A. National People's Army (Nationale Volksarmee)

The direct successor of the People's Police Alert Units (Volkspolizei Bereitschaften) and the Garrisoned People's Police (Kasernierte Volkspolizei), the NVA was formerly established on 18 January 1956 "to increase the defense capabilities and to assure the safety of the DDR." The 1958 DDR budget provided 980 million East marks for the "establishment" of the NVA, but at least 30 billion East marks had been expended between 1948 and 1955 on the VP and KVP.

The Ministry of National Defense, located in the former KVP headquarters in Strausberg, east of Berlin, is the supreme command for the entire NVA, including the Air Force and Navy. Responsibility for the political reliability and training of the NVA is shared with the SED Central Committee. The Ministry, however, controls the armaments industry and, since 1 March 1956, the GST, which carries out pre-military training of youth. Since the Ministry was established, the Defense Minister has been Willi Stoph, a member of the SED Politburo, who holds the rank of Colonel General.

Naval headquarters is in Rostock and is commanded by Vice Admiral Waldemar Verner. It comprises one Coast Guard Division, two Mine-laying and Mine-sweeping Divisions, a Salvage and Rescue Command, a Pioneer Unit, and various other components. Training facilities include a Naval Officers' School, an NCO School, an Engineer Officers' School, and an Intelligence Officers' School. The Navy has more than 120 naval craft, including three destroyers, 40 speedboats and a number of minesweepers and small submarines. During 1959 the Soviet Union is scheduled to deliver three more destroyers and a number of submarines.

B. Frontier Police (Grenzpolizei)

A garrisoned military-type organization charged with guarding the frontier areas of the DDR, the Frontier Police were first organized within the framework of the Ministry of Interior. In May 1952 it was shifted to the jurisdiction of the State Secretariat for State Security (Staatssekretariat fuer Staatssicherheit - Sfs), only to be returned to the Interior Ministry on 27 June 1953. In April 1955 it once again was returned to the Sfs (which became the Ministry for State Security--MfS--in November 1955). Since 15 February 1957 it has again been under Interior Ministry jurisdiction.

The Grenzpolizei (GP) is the sole agency for the guarding and control of the state frontiers and of the Outer Berlin Ring. Until November 1957, when the task was transferred to the Office for Customs and Merchandise Control (Amt fuer Zoll und Kontrolle des Warenverkehrs), the GP was also charged with control of people and merchandise moving across DDR borders.

Commanded by Maj. Gen. Ludwig, the GP has its headquarters at Paetz, near Koenigswusterhausen. Its 38,000 men--there are also an additional 8,000 "auxiliary" frontier guards--wear olive-brown Soviet-style uniforms and have military, rather than police, rank designations.

The GP troops are organized into 29 motorized regiments (Bereitschaften), which are equipped with medium arms. These regiments, in turn, are organized into seven brigades, with three to five regiments in each brigade. Since the beginning of 1958, the GP has also had a number of independent battalions each composed of three companies of heavy artillery and one company of tanks.

The GP operates some coast guard and speed boats on the Baltic. Other special units include a training regiment at Ludwigsfelde and some so-called Enlightenment Groups (Aufklärungsgruppen), which are used for political surveillance and secret assignments.

The GP has its own training installations, which include an officers' training school at Sonderhausen and a political officers' school at Gross Glienicke.

C. Transport Police (Transportpolizei)

Charged with the security of railway stations, yards and cars, the Transport Police (Trapos) were first organized in January 1953 as a branch of the Security Police. Since February 1957, however, the Trapos, like the Frontier Police, have been controlled by the Ministry of Interior.

Despite the nature of their duties, the Trapos are organized along military lines and are, in fact, essentially infantry troops. The 30 April 1957 issue of the official Fahrt Frei openly emphasized their military training.

Commanded by Chief Inspector Otto Auerswald, the 8,500 Trapos wear a dark blue uniform and are organized territorially into eight sections corresponding to the eight DDR railway directorates.

D. Alert Police (Bereitschaftspolizei)

Constituting the garrisoned troops of the present regular police organization (Main Administration of the German People's Police - Hauptverwaltung Deutsche Volkspolizei), these Alert Police are not to be confused with the original Alert Units (Bereitschaften) of the People's Police. The present Alert Police has been developed since the end of 1954 from the Watch Units (Wachverbänden) of the Sfs. Called Internal Troops (Innere Truppen) from 1954 until 1 October 1956, the Alert Police was transferred, along with the Frontier and Transport Police, from the MfS to the Ministry of Interior on 15 February 1957.

The Alert Police are designed for use in suppressing uprisings, and its members are therefore carefully selected for their loyalty to the SED. They receive military training according to Soviet methods, and wear the same gray-green uniform of the regular police. The commanding officer is Maj. Gen. Winkelmann, with headquarters at Koenigswusterhausen.

The 25,000 to 28,000 men in the Alert Police are organized into some 18 motorized units, which are stationed in the main cities and towns, as well as several modern motorized infantry regiments, each with one tank company per battalion and one field artillery battery.

The Alert Police has a training regiment at Potsdam, an officers' school at Halberstadt, and various other training centers.

E. Combat Groups (Kampfgruppen)

The Kampfgruppen are para-military units, roughly equivalent to the Storm Trooper goon squads of Nazi Germany. Controlled directly by the SED, with weapons provided by the People's Police, they are to be found throughout the DDR in factories, cooperatives, schools, institutions of all kinds and, especially, People's Owned Enterprises (Volkseigene Betriebe - VEB) installations.

Since the Kampfgruppen are designed primarily to assist the SED maintain its control over the country, the SED exercises a close political leadership and surveillance through the Security Department (Abteilung Sicherheit) of its Central Committee. However, since the Kampfgruppen must cooperate with the regular police in carrying out their mission, operational command has, since the beginning of 1958, been vested in a Kampfgruppen Section (Abteilung Kampfgruppen) of the Police Administration.

Composed of men between the ages of 25 and 55, with men over 55 forming a reserve, the Kampfgruppen are organized along military lines into "hundreds," platoons and squads. Leadership and training are provided by group commanders trained in special schools. Members wear a grey-blue uniform and are equipped with light weapons (e.g., sub-machineguns). The Kampfgruppen have an estimated strength of 300,000 of whom perhaps one-half are active.